

Howard Pyle

Howard Pyle was born to Quaker parents in Wilmington, Delaware in 1853. He studied art briefly in Philadelphia, and in 1876 went to work for Harper's in New York, an association which was to last the rest of his life, as did his friendships with fellow illustrators like Edwin Abbey and A.B. Frost.

Feeling his apprenticeship in New York fulfilled, Pyle returned to Wilmington, where for thirty odd years he produced a remarkable outpouring of children's books (The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood, Pepper and Salt, Otto of the Silver Hand, The King Arthur series, and others), and thousands of illustrations for Harper's and other leading publications of his day. Noted for his authoritative representation of the American historical scene, Pyle was equally gifted in his depiction of medieval subjects.

At the height of his success he launched himself into a teaching career, first at Drexel in Philadelphia, then in Wilmington, and at a summer school at Chadds Ford. "Throw your heart into your picture, and leap in after it," he advised his students, who numbered among them such illustrious names as N.C. Wyeth, Frank E. Schoonover, Stanley M. Arthurs, W.J. Aylward, Thornton and Violet Oakley, and Harvey Dunn, to name but a few. Pyle's mural paintings included a series for the Hudson County Courthouse, Jersey City, New Jersey, and "The Battle of Nashville," painted in 1907 for the Wisconsin State Capitol. Probably no other man left such an indelible imprint on the quality of American illustration, his students perpetuating his teaching methods and enriching American illustration for the next generation and beyond.

When Howard Pyle died in Italy in 1911 on his first trip abroad, Harper's eulogized, "We shall not see his like again."

Pyle's famous pirate pictures and his American historical illustrations were brought together in Howard Pyle's Book of Pirates and The Book of the American Spirit, published in 1921 and 1923 by Harper and Brothers.